

Domiciliary #6 (Sawtelle)  
Veterans Administration Center #12  
Wilshire & Sawtelle Boulevards  
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County  
California

HABS No. CAL-336

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction  
1000 Geary Street  
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT  
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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DOMICILIARY #6, (SAWTELLE)  
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION CENTER #12

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California

ADDRESS: Wilshire and Sawtelle Boulevards  
OWNER: United States Veterans Administration  
OCCUPANT: United States Veterans Administration  
USE: Domiciliary for disabled veterans, originally; final use, Administration Office for Recreational Section, Veterans Administration

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Domiciliary #6, whose photo is a part of this report, was one of five "Shingle Style" domiciliaries built between the years 1891 and 1901. This building was demolished in 1960. Its main significance was in the fact that it was part of the most monumental complex of "Shingle Style" buildings ever designed in Los Angeles. These structures ranged around a "U" shaped compound, open to the south. The long rectangular buildings with surrounding verandas recalled the typical resort hotels being built in this period. The complex included dormitories, a dining hall, hospital, headquarters building, cottage residences for the staff (the first house built, for the first resident doctor, Dr. Hasse, still stands), street car depot, chapel and architects' detail offices (latter three still standing), and a library (recently demolished), all surrounded by landscaped grounds. Of the original domiciliary buildings, only #9 - the most westerly of the group - remains. It was built in 1901, similar in details and construction to #6, and is used as a comparative guide in describing #6. In many respects #9 was perhaps the best designed of all.

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## HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The original necessity of Sawtelle was the result of an act of Congress after the Civil War in 1865 to establish National Soldiers Homes to care for the disabled and aged veterans of the war. In 1878, an act authorized a Home west of the Rocky Mountains. After several years of surveying many proposed sites, the one offered by the owners of Rancho San Jose de Buenos Aires and of the Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica was selected. This Home opened its doors as the Pacific Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, on May 1, 1888. At the close of World War I, a Veterans Bureau was created and the Consolidation Act of 1930 combined the National Home, the Veterans Bureau, and the Bureau of Pensions into a single governmental agency known as the Veterans Administration.<sup>1</sup>

The first structure on the site was a residence for the first surgeon, Dr. Hermann Hasse (Building #27), which was completed in December 1888; Dr. Hasse's daughter wrote that the first building for use of the veterans was completed shortly thereafter.<sup>2</sup> All of the domiciliaries were of wood framing, finished with siding and shingles, were three stories in height and had basements; all had porches on all sides of the first two floors. The detailing was similar, also. The architects were Peters and Burns of Dayton, Ohio, later of Los Angeles. They possibly designed other buildings for the complex, for according to an 1889 report, a building or buildings of theirs were being completed in that year.<sup>3</sup> It may also be noted that a previous Soldiers Home had been built in their home town of Dayton, Ohio.

The first domiciliary, built in 1891, was demolished when Wilshire Boulevard was cut through the grounds. The second one, about 200 feet north of the latter, was #6, adjacent to the Chapel (Building #20 - see CAL-335) and was built in 1893. The most westerly domiciliary of the original layout, and the only one left of this group, was #9, built in 1901.

Domiciliary #6 faced west and stood approximately 100 feet east and 100 feet to the north of the Chapel. An early photo of Sawtelle, included with this report, shows a relationship of seven buildings with the existing Chapel. This photo also indicated a former cupola on #6 to the left of the main gable (later removed) and a different arrangement of porch railing. Further, there were six bays in

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evidence on the second floor southwest veranda. The bay closest to the main entrance on the second floor was apparently filled in at a later time. The main tower over the west portico was extended out over the roof, subsequently, for the addition of an exterior elevator. The latter rose from the first to third floors and closed off half of the second floor porch and formed an extension of the main gable.

On a sheet of the plans for Domiciliary #6 (undated) is a notation by the architects to reverse the grade for #9 indicating that the same general plan was used for these two buildings and most likely served as a model for all the domiciliaries. The original charm of these buildings is more evident in #9, which has been handled more sensitively and as long as it may be preserved it can serve to remind of the delight and sincerity which characterized the best of the "Shingle Style" at the turn of the century.

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#### ADDITIONAL SOURCES

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Colonel Robert Amedee Bringham, former director, V.A.,  
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Mr. Metz, Planning Department, Sawtelle

Mr. Greenberg, Engineering Department, Sawtelle

Mr. Joe Lessen, Publications Department, Sawtelle

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#### ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The following outline for Domiciliary #6, which was a three-story wood frame structure - now demolished - is based mainly on existing records, old photographs and drawings. There remain only one sheet of drawings for #6, a print from the original linen tracing - showing a rear (east) elevation and a transverse section through a typical wing. Additionally, four prints for Domiciliary #9, which is similar to #6, remain and are on file with the Veterans Administration at Sawtelle.

#### EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions: 188' x 26' with 12' wide porches on west (front) and east (rear) elevations; 8' porches at the north and south ends. The central tower at the west transept was 44' square and there was a 12' wide entry porch at this same area.

Wall Construction: The first and second floor walls were 2x6s - 16" c.c., "balloon frame" up to third floor (attic) rafter line, 29'-6" full height. The typical exterior finish was 6" "rustic" clapboard siding; selected surfaces of the transept were decorated with wood shingles in "fish scale" and staggered patterns.

Foundations: Footings, stepped brick; basement walls, brick 12" thick; interior brick columns 1'-9" square along the centerline of the north-south axis, spaced an average of 10'-6" c.c.

Porches: The continuous surrounding verandas of the first and second floors, which had simple stick balustrades and 6" square double wood columns and arches, were the most notable and delightful elements of the design.

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The central east-west transept divided the veranda on the long west elevation into two symmetrical units of five bays on the first floor and six bays on the second. The short north and south ends had three bays each and the veranda wrapped around the rear (east) elevation for two bays at each corner. Bays were typically 13'-6" o.c. and were divided by double columns about 1'-9" c.c. The continuous balustrade between was of square milled sticking, arranged in a staggered grid pattern having a Japanese feeling, and 2'-6" high. The ends of the top rail rose in a curve at the columns. Later alterations removed the horizontals of the balustrade and another rail was added above. Each bay of the first floor had a flat, three centered wood arch which was filled in with wood spindles forming a screen effect, but later removed.

The second floor verandas were similar except that in lieu of the arches with screens, the columns were simply capped with a small curved wooden bracket supporting the porch beam. An early (1902) photo shows the veranda at the west elevation of the south wing in six bays. The later projection of the main central element over the west porch filled in one bay to leave five bays, as now seen on the latest photo of this report.

The main porch at the central west transept had two bays flanking a central one at which were wooden steps. The columns at this porch were also doubled but turned instead of square milled. The balustrade and bracket capitals were similar to the second floor verandas.

Roof: Gables at the north-south wings and at the east-west transept. The construction was of 2x8 rafters at 2'-0" o.c., with a 2x6 collar beam at 2'-0" o.c., the bottom of which was about 8'-0" above the plate line. A continuous 1x8 ridge plate projected partially above the ridge forming a decorative crest line. There were shed roofs over the second floor verandas of shallower pitch, constructed of 2x6 rafters at 2'-0" o.c. The typical finish was shingles. The porch roofs were hipped at the corners. Two three-window attic dormers with hipped roofs and a ventilating turret connected to ducts in the attic space, which served the dormitories, projected through the roof of each wing of the building. A cupola, which rested on the

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square tower at the west entrance and rose above the ridge line of the transept, was removed during later alterations. However, the semicircular platform of the balcony that extended from the tower can still be seen in the latest photo. The original wood shingles were later replaced with asphalt shingles.

Chimneys: A brick chimney at the south elevation projected up through the ridge about six feet.

Doorways and Doors: Plain softwood frames and casings around the doors were typical. The main doors were in pairs, the lower half in horizontal panels and the upper half in fixed glazed lights, with transoms above; main doors were 8'-0" in height, the rear door was 7'-8" with a transom aligned with the typical window head.

Windows: Typical softwood finished frames and casings that matched the doors; typical size was about 3' x 9', double hung; each half divided into 4 lights of 18" x 24" with wood muntins. Dormer windows were grouped in threes of which each had sash with six lights of 12" x 12" arranged two abreast. One half-round arched window at the west elevator tower at the attic was a later addition.

Cornice: Stock wood cornice moulds were used typically at eaves and gables of the transepts and end wings. The eaves of the porches were projecting rafters with stock band sawed scallops and extended shingles over. At the west central transept, there were two stock wood mould cornice belts at the square tower in line with the eaves and extended out in a bell shaped curve. The elevator tower adjacent, which was a later addition, had a continuation of these belt courses and were matched to appear as if part of the original work.

Miscellaneous: The tympanum of the west transept gable was decorated with a series of concentric part circular wood bats whose centers were at each of the corners of the gable. The surfaces of space between bats were filled with plaster giving a curious half-timbered effect. This design was repeated for the other buildings also. The later addition of the elevator tower partially concealed this design, as well as partially covering the second floor arched porch below and completely enclosing the

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main first floor entrance doors. The pedimented portico at this main west entrance had a notable piece of scroll work, probably of standard mould pattern common for the day, which covered the tympanum.

#### INTERIOR

Floor Plan: The partially excavated basement was used for storage. The first floor central transept comprised stairway, visitors' waiting room, washroom, toilets, showers, linen room and corridors. Each floor of the symmetrical wings was originally a large dormitory barracks for the resident veterans. In 1944 these floors were divided into twelve bedrooms, six per side, with a central corridor. The third floor was in reality a finished attic divided into two recreation rooms, one for each wing, with closets, showers and toilets in the central transept. The plan for #6 was oriented in the north-south direction for the long axis.

Flooring: The basement storage floor was concrete. The first floor consisted of 2" x 14" joists at 16" o.c. spanning laterally from brick wall to wall and supported at midspan by an 8" x 10" girder resting on brick columns spaced about 10'-6" o.o. The finished flooring was 1" x 4" T&G hardwood over 1x4 sub-flooring on 1" sheathing. The second and third floors were of similar construction except the joists were of clear span across the width of the wing - about 25'-0" - to the inside face of the studs, and supported on let-in ledgers for the second floor. The attic floor joists were additionally tied to the rafters with 1x4 diagonals at 4'-0" o.c.

Walls: Typically 2" studs at 16" c.c. with wood lath and plaster. Later alterations after 1944 were of gyp lath and plaster.

Ceilings: Typically of wood lath and plaster directly on the joists. The original heights for the first and second floors were about 13' and the third floor attic was about 7'-10" which was the bottom line of the collar beam for the rafters. Later alterations reduced the first and second floor ceiling line to the window head which was 10'-4" above the finished floor.

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Doorways and Doors: Typically softwood finish frames, casings and applied stops. The original doors to the large dormitory rooms were a pair of swinging, double-acting leaves, each of which was 1-3/4" x 2'-8" x 8'-0" high, with horizontal panels in pairs at top and bottom and vertical pairs of panels in the middle third. Most of the original doors were removed in the later alterations and replaced with stock 1-3/8" x 6'-8"

Trim: Door casings were of softwood, about 1" x 8" with a stock center mould having a plinth design at the base and square cap at the corners. Windows had wood moulded casings, aprons and cove moulds, stock patterns. The base was 1" x 10" wood with a stock mould at the edge and a shoe mould at the hardwood floor.

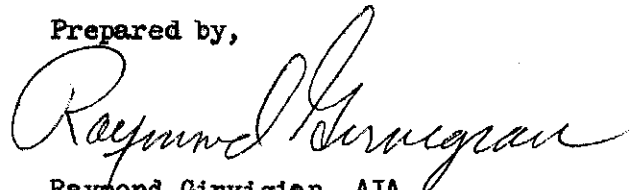
Hardware: Assumed as originally cast metal applied latch-sets, butt hinges and porcelain knobs with main doors having spring activated double-acting hinges. All were replaced.

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